Sample Answer

The nature-nurture debate is a popular, ongoing debate in Psychology which argues that our behaviour is determined by innate, inherited characteristics on one hand (nature) or external environmental influences or social factors on the other hand (nurture). Schizophrenia can be explained by the nature debate when considering the biochemical basis of behaviour. One idea is that dopamine levels significantly influence the likelihood of developing Schizophrenia. For example, the 'dopamine-hypothesis' claims that excess levels of dopamine in the brain contribute to the positive symptoms of Schizophrenia (specifically in the Mesolimbic System). For instance, a person with Schizophrenia may experience auditory hallucinations in which they hear voices in their head. This tells us that Schizophrenia is caused by excessive activity at synapses that use dopamine as their primary neurotransmitter. This is useful because it allows us to specifically target that neurotransmitter using anti-psychotic drugs, reducing the symptoms for the patient. However, **Lindstroem et al (1999)** raises some caution with adopting a generalised view, as they found that Schizophrenic patients in their experiment were naturally producing more dopamine when compared to a control group. Another way in which Schizophrenia can be seen to be explained using the nature debate is by looking at the evidence from genetic studies. It is suggested that there is often a family history of Schizophrenia in patients and these inherited characteristics can be attributed to the onset of the disorder. For example, evidence from **Gottesman & Shields (1961)** indicates that there is a 48% concordance rate for identical twins and Schizophrenia, suggesting that if one twin has Schizophrenia, there is a 48% chance the other twin will develop it too. This is also supported by further research by **Gottesman (2010)** who found a strong link for Schizophrenia between parents and their offspring. This study found that offspring are 31.7 times more likely to develop Schizophrenia when both parents have been diagnosed with Schizophrenia. This is useful because it allows us to see the relationship between genetics and Schizophrenia and could be particularly useful for people diagnosed with Schizophrenia who want to make decisions about marriage, children and future planning. However, one limitation of this argument is that it rules out environmental influences, but we know that most people are living in the same household so may learn to develop Schizophrenia instead. In contrast there are arguments for the nurture debate in Schizophrenia. This suggests that influences or perceptions in our external social environment could impact on the development of Schizophrenia. The cognitive explanation suggests that Schizophrenia is caused by faulty thinking patterns which may affect the way people perceive the world around them. It sees the causes of Schizophrenia as a problem with information processing, and it is thought that Schizophrenic patients have distorted beliefs and disordered thinking which influence their behaviour. They also have an inability to reflect on their own thoughts and behaviour. This means that they have problems believing that certain behaviours are carried out by them. For example, they may deny carrying out an aggressive act which was witnessed by a family member. This idea is supported by **Frith (1992)** who found two specific difficulties in the cognitive processing of Schizophrenic patients; one was an inability to reflect on their own thoughts, behaviour and experiences (metarepresentation) and the other was an inability to suppress their automatic responses to certain stimuli when they performed actions that reflected their wishes or intentions. This idea is also supported by **Baron-Cohen** who suggests that Schizophrenia is explained by having an impaired 'Theory of Mind', which is the ability to see

something from someone else's perspective. These research studies support the nurture side of the debate; however, they fail to appreciate the influence of biological factors in the development of Schizophrenia. In conclusion, perhaps a combination of the nature-nurture debate explains the development of Schizophrenia and examples such as the 'Diathesis-stress' model may be more appropriate, suggesting that people could be born with a biological pre-disposition but would only develop the disorder if this was triggered by environmental stressors.